

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 SAM-01 SAJ-01 ACDA-19 EB-11 COME-00

SIL-01 LAB-06 TRSE-00 DRC-01 OMB-01 /169 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0522

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION BERLIN

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY BERN

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

USMISSION GENEVA

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

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AMCONSUL STUTTGART

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 02697

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: BRANDT BESET BY TROUBLES; RUMORS OF RESIGNATION

1. SUMMARY: THE WEST GERMAN PRESS IN THE PAST FEW DAYS HAS CARRIED WHAT APPEAR TO BE WELL-INFORMED ARTICLES CONCERNING WILLY BRANDT'S DEEP UNHAPPINESS WITH THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN THE FRG. ESPECIALLY DISTURBING TO HIM, APPARENTLY, WAS THE RECENT INFLATIONARY WAGE SETTLEMENT WITH THE PUBLIC SERVICE UNIONS WHICH BRANDT KNOWS WILL SET THE PATTERN FOR OTHER UNION BARGAINING IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AHEAD. THIS PROBLEM, COMING IN CONJUNCTION WITH A SERIES OF OTHER SETBACKS AND DIFFICULTIES, IS SAID TO BE CAUSING BRANDT TO CONSIDER STEPPING DOWN AS CHANCELLOR. ALTHOUGH SENIOR SPD SOURCES ARE DENYING THESE RUMORS, BRANDT HAS APPEARED SOMEWHAT TIRED AND DISPIRITED IN HIS PUBLIC APPEARANCES RECENTLY. WHILE IT IS QUITE UNLIKELY THAT HE IS SERIOUSLY CONTEMPLATING RESIGNATION, BRANDT CERTAINLY REALIZES THAT THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL-ECONOMIC SITUATION IN GERMANY IS NOT LIKELY TO SHOW IMPROVEMENT IN THE COMING YEAR AND THIS WILL NOT IMPROVE HIS PRESENT GLOOMY MOOD. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PRESTIGIOUS FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG CARRIED SEVERAL STORIES LAST WEEK DEPICTING BRANDT AS DEEPLY DEPRESSED BY THE RECENT COURSE OF EVENTS IN THE FRG. THE WIDELY-READ WEEKLY MAGAZINE, DER SPIEGEL, PICKED UP THE THEME IN ITS LEAD ARTICLE ON FEBRUARY 18. PARTICULARLY DISMAYING TO BRANDT, ACCORDING TO THE PRESS ACCOUNTS, WAS THE STRIKE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE UNIONS AND THE RESULTANT WAGE SETTLEMENT, AMOUNTING IN FACT TO ABOUT A 13 PERCENT WAGE INCREASE. BRANDT HAD PREVIOUSLY ASSERTED THAT NO INCREASE ABOVE 10 PERCENT WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE. HE FOUND LITTLE SUPPORT FOR HIS POSITION IN THE PARTY OR UNION LEADERSHIPS, HOWEVER, AND WAS EVENTUALLY FORCED TO ACCEPT A SOLUTION THAT IS OBVIOUSLY INFLATIONARY AND WHICH WILL SET THE PATTERN FOR OTHER

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UPCOMING WAGE NEGOTIATIONS IN OTHER SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY.

3. THE INFLATION PROBLEM, THEREFORE, IS ONE THAT BRANDT KNOWS WILL BE WITH HIM FOR A LONG TIME TO COME. AND HE ALSO KNOWS THAT IT IS THE SORT OF ISSUE THAT WILL HURT THE SPD IN THE FOUR STATE ELECTIONS LATER THIS YEAR AND THAT WILL FURTHER ERODE THE ALREADY DIMINISHING POLITI-

CAL POPULARITY OF THE SPD. ADDED TO THIS PRACTICAL PROBLEM IS A PSYCHOLOGICALLY DAMAGING ONE, NAMELY THAT THE FRG'S FIRST POSTWAR SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC CHANCELLOR SEEMS UNABLE TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH THE SPD'S MAJOR SOURCE OF ELECTORAL SUPPORT, THE TRADE UNIONS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS HOW HEAVILY THIS ELEMENT WEIGHS ON BRANDT, BUT HE IS A SENSITIVE AND PROUD SOCIAL DEMOCRAT WHO CANNOT HAVE TAKEN THIS DEVELOPMENT EASILY.

4. THE PRESS REPORTS HAVE INDICATED THAT BRANDT IS SO DEPRESSED BY THE RECENT TURN OF EVENTS THAT HE IS CONTEMPLATING STEPPING DOWN AS CHANCELLOR. STATE SECRETARY GRABERT AT THE CHANCELLERY AND THE GOVERNMENT PRESS SPOKESMAN BOTH HAVE DENIED THESE RUMORS, BUT OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH SPD POLITICIANS INDICATE THAT BRANDT IS, IN FACT, SERIOUSLY TROUBLED. INDEED, IN HIS RECENT DEBATE, HE APPEARS TIRED AND EVEN MELANCHOLY. ALL OF THIS HAS BEEN SEEN BEFORE IN OTHER YEARS, OF COURSE; BRANDT IS KNOWN FOR HIS PERIODS OF UPS AND DOWNS.

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BUT THE PRESENT DOWN HAS LASTED NOW FOR SEVERAL MONTHS,
AND THE PROSPECTS AHEAD ARE NOT VERY BRIGHT.

5. PART OF THE PROBLEM LIES IN THE FACT THAT MANY OF BRANDT'S DIFFICULTIES ARE NOT ALL OF HIS OWN MAKING, AND FURTHER, CANNOT BE SOLVED BY HIM ALONE. THE ENERGY CRISIS, INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, THE DISAFFECTION OF THE SPD'S YOUTH WING, THE BRAKING EFFECT OF THE COALITION PARTNER, THE FDP, ON DOMESTIC REFORMS, THE UNIVERSITY UNREST, NOT TO MENTION THE PROBLEMS FACING THE FRG IN THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS FIELD (E.G., A FALTERING EC, AND AN EVEN MORE FALTERING EASTERN POLICY)--ALL OF THIS MUST APPEAR TO BRANDT TO REPRESENT A MOUNTAIN OF PRACTICALLY INSOLUBLE ISSUES. OR, AT LEAST, THEY REQUIRE AN EXPENDITURE OF ENERGY AND POLITICAL CAPITAL THAT BRANDT FOR THE TIME BEING SEEMS INCAPABLE OF PROVIDING.

6. BRANDT'S BURDENS ARE NOT EASED BY THE PRESENT STRAINS WITHIN THE COALITION. EVER SINCE FDP LEADER SCHEEL ANNOUNCED FOR THE FEDERAL PRESIDENCY, THERE HAS BEEN A JOCKEYING FOR POSITION WITHIN THE COALITION THAT HAS LEFT BRANDT VEXED AND EVEN BITTER. THE FDP'S WILLINGNESS TO SEE THE COALITION CONTINUE BEYOND THE 1976 FEDERAL ELECTIONS HAS COME INTO QUESTION, WITH SCHEEL

PERSONALLY HAVING ASSURED CDU LEADER KOHL IN RECENT DAYS THAT THE FDP'S FUTURE COURSE REMAINS OPEN. THIS IS CLEARLY A LEGITIMATE FDP EFFORT TO RETAIN IMPORTANT POLICY OPTIONS, BUT IT NONETHELESS HITS BRANDT AT A TIME WHEN HE NEEDS SEELENMASSAGE ("SOUL MASSAGING"--THE FAVORITE GERMAN TERM FOR THE REGULAR EFFORT EXPENDED ON PROVIDING SOLACE AND REASSURANCE TO BRANDT).

7. THE SITUATION FOR BRANDT IN BONN THESE DAYS IS THEREFORE ABOUT AS DISMAL AS THE RHINELAND WINTER, AND IT SHOWS LITTLE SIGN OF IMPROVING. BUT WE QUESTION THAT IT WOULD BRING HIM SERIOUSLY TO CONSIDER GIVING UP THE CHANCELLORSHIP. HE IS A MAN OF STRONG PRIDE, BOTH IN HIS OWN AND IN THE SPD'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS; AND HE IS CONFIDENTIAL

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UNDOUBTEDLY AWARE THAT HIS PROBLEMS ARE NO LARGER AND, INDEED, A GOOD DEAL LESS DIFFICULT THAN THOSE FACING OTHER WEST EUROPEAN LEADERS AT PRESENT. MORE-OVER, ON A PERSONAL NOTE, BRANDT KNOWS THAT IF HE WERE TO STEP ASIDE, THE OBVIOUS HEIR WOULD BE HELMUT SCHMIDT, THE PRICKLY HAMBURG POLITICIAN WHOM BRANDT PERSONALLY AND POLITICALLY RESENTS AS A TOO -OPPORTUNISTIC SUCCESSOR.

8. IN SUM, THEREFORE, WE TEND TO BELIEVE THAT BRANDT WILL CONTINUE AS CHANCELLOR UNTIL 1976 AT LEAST. BUT HIS GLOOMY MOOD IS NOT APT TO UNDERGO RAPID CHANGE AND HIS POLITICAL BURDENS WILL NOT DECREASE. ONE THING AT LEAST SEEMS CLEAR: BRANDT'S PRESENT GLOOM HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HIS OTHER MORE PUBLIC THREATS OF RESIGNATION IN RECENT YEARS. THESE THREATS ALWAYS HAD A PURPOSE, USUALLY TO BRING THE SPD OR THE COALITION INTO LINE. THE PRESENT CASE SEEMS TO REFLECT A MORE QUIET SENSE OF DESPERATION AT THE EXTENT OF THE TROUBLES SURROUNDING HIM.
HILLENBRAND

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